



First Christian Church

(Disciples of Christ)

602 North Orchard Street Tacoma, Washington 98406

Fourth Sunday After Pentecost - Juneteenth

"Jesus: The Incarcerated Incarnate"



June 20, 2021

Doug Welcome: Good morning. I welcome you to worship wherever you may find yourselves in this moment. As we prepare our hearts and minds for worship, I invite you to gather your communion elements, perhaps a candle if you'd like to light that, to remind you of God's presence in your midst. Let us pause and give thanks to the God who holds each of us this day, and in this service and who calls us to justice and freedom for all. Let us worship.

Prelude

FCC Trio (Ben, Sam, and Plum)

All Things Bright and Beautiful

****Call to Worship**

Florette Ebengho

We gather in the presence of God - the One who frees and empowers those on the margins. The One who hears the cries of the oppressed and charges those with privilege and positions of power to do what is just and what is righteous.

We gather in the presence of God - who liberates and calls each of us to be conscious citizens, standing up for our siblings in need.

Let us worship God.

OPENING SONG

FCC Trio

Fairest lord Jesus

LISTENING TO GOD IN PRAYER

With Pastor Doug Collins

Music by Ben Smith, Solo Piano

Hear Our Prayer

Morning Prayer

I invite you to join me in the pastoral prayer.

Oh God, who comes in the form of the Christ, who stands with those in prison walls, those of physical barriers, and those of spiritual and mental barriers to the freedom and the joy with which you have created each and every one of us, we give you thanks for this day. We give you thanks for the many whose lives have been lived out to continue working for your freedom for all. We give you thanks for the message of Juneteenth, to those in Texas on that fateful day, 156 years ago. And we give you thanks for your convicting love, which sets none of us free from our own actions and our own place in makes manifest your creation and your realm, here and now.

We give you thanks for the community which calls us and names us, and for that on which you would focus our minds and our attention this morning. That justice may fall down on all. That justice may flow through the streets and through our homes and through the prisons. And that all may know your love and that all may sing peace.

We bring much to you this morning and we pray for those whose bodies and minds are in need of healing. We pray for all nations, seeking peace that your wisdom will fill the leaders of nations and of groups, small and large, that you would help us know the power we possess, using our own hands and feet to make known your justice.

So together, let us pray aloud the prayer your son has taught us, however, we know best saying: Our Creator, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us, not into temptation, but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen

Bringing Words to Life

With Florette Ebengho

Luke 5:27-32

²⁷ After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." ²⁸ And he got up, left everything, and followed him.

²⁹ Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house; and there was a large crowd of tax collectors and others sitting at the table with them. ³⁰ The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" ³¹ Jesus answered, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; ³² I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance."

Feasting on the Word with Pastor Doug Collins

"Jesus: The Incarcerated Incarnate"

On the eve of January 1st, 1863, enslaved and free African Americans gathered in churches and homes across the United States as they prepared for the long-awaited moment for the Emancipation Proclamation to finally take effect. Long before the days of the internet, according to the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, the spread of the news was carried out primarily by Union soldiers, many of whom were Black, who marched across plantations and many of the major cities of the south, where they read aloud personal copies of the Proclamation for all to hear. And though this day in history marked a new era for hundreds of thousands of African Americans who would spend their newly found freedom in pursuit of reuniting with loved ones and fighting to reclaim and recover from all that had been stolen from them, the state of Texas, still under Confederate control, was not bound to implement the new Proclamation. It wasn't until just 156 years ago yesterday, June 19th, 1865, when approximately 2,000 Union troops made their way to Galveston Bay, Texas to announce that by presidential decree, the 250,000 children of God who were still enslaved there, were free. This day came to be known as Juneteenth.

We pause this morning, remembering all whose lives and way of life were taken away, whose dignity was stripped bare at the evil hand of white supremacy. We lift up and celebrate the giants of the movement for freedom and civil rights, and as we'll see in our study of Luke, we'll note the Spirit's essential role in working through and with human beings, for none other than the work of liberation, of freeing each one in bondage to live out their life as God has so consecrated. But the work, as Jesus reminds us, is far from over.

It was that very same year of Juneteenth, 1865, when one plantation would be kept wide open. It was in 1865 when a new organization was formed to keep that one remaining plantation running, known today as the American Correctional Association. Yes, the law indeed stated that African Americans could no longer be owned as slaves, the law on the books stated that they were to be considered equal and free, and yet who can expect a system that is designed with only some in mind to benefit all?

Not even a few months had passed between the last of enslaved Texans' promise of freedom before the white regime created a new set of rules that would not only disempower freed African Americans but would keep many of them and their children locked up for many more generations, trumping up charges and casting a stone on those with black and brown skin to blame for the inequalities which were thrust upon them in the first place.

We recognize the significance of Juneteenth in the United States because it is a day to celebrate the end of one era of oppression, and yet we don't have to look too far today to see the rippling effects of that oppression as it continues to disempower black and brown individuals in the United States today.

In her book, "The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness," Michelle Alexander writes: "The genius of the current caste system, and what most distinguishes it from its predecessors, is that it appears voluntary. People choose to commit crimes, and that's why they are locked up or locked out, we are told. This feature makes the politics of responsibility particularly tempting, as it appears the system can be avoided with good behavior. But herein lies the trap. All people make mistakes. All of us are sinners. All of us are criminals. All of us violate the law at some point in our lives. In fact, if the worst thing you have ever done is speed ten miles over the speed limit on the freeway, you have put yourself and others at more risk of harm than someone smoking marijuana in the privacy of his or her living room. Yet there are people in the United States serving life sentences for first-time drug offenses, something virtually unheard of anywhere else in the world."

The Gospel for this morning speaks a word to each of us who find ourselves eager to learn about what we can do about this system we find ourselves in. Jesus had been travelling around at this point in the Book of Luke, gaining notoriety for not just his words of peace and liberation, but for the healing he had caused to take place. He knew full well the weight of bearing charges that were trumped up without cause and yet God-with-us took the form of our human flesh so as to show us the extravagance of God's care for human suffering, for humans, God's children.

Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit, the text says, travelling to Galilee to read before the people an old scroll from the Prophet Isaiah himself.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Jesus rolled up the scroll and looked around at his followers, practically falling over themselves trying to lean in and hear every last word Jesus might have to say about this familiar religious text they had come to know so well. They looked to him, as if to say, "okay, now what?"

"Today, the scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." They were amazed by his statement, transfixed by his words which felt so familiar yet left them with so many questions.

Founder and President of The Exodus Foundation, Madeline McClenney-Sadler, writes about how many in society are so obsessed with status – status, not just of who has what, but who has done what, who will do what, who can do what. She describes the listeners' response to Jesus as a background check of sorts; "Isn't this guy the son of Joseph?!"

The question is an attempt to make sense of this thing Jesus is pushing at that doesn't make sense in the worldly scheme of life. How could it be that this man who is here to bring the Word of God to us, be telling us about all these calamities in which God didn't swoop in and fix it all for us? How could it be that Jesus is who he claims to be, and yet his message compels us into action, rather than allowing us to sit on our hands and just be thankful that God's got it all under control?

The truth of the day was met with rage. It was met with rage because it didn't free the people there to hear it from recognizing their own complacency in keeping the structures

designed to perpetuate oppression, just as strong as ever. They were mad because the truth Jesus was dropping on them was making them realize that not even God in the flesh would be able to come down from the top of a hill and do a magic wand dance and all of a sudden make the earth the place in which the realm of God is made known in perfection.

According to the NAACP: today, a Black person is five times more likely to be stopped by a police officer without just cause than a white person. A Black man is twice as likely to be stopped without just cause than a Black woman. One out of every three Black boys born today can expect to be sentenced to prison, compared to 1 out of 6 LatinX boys and one out of 17 white boys. 5% of illicit drug users are African American, yet African Americans represent 29% of those arrested and 33% of those incarcerated for drug offenses. In the 2015 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, about 17 million white people and 4 million African Americans reported having used an illicit drug within the last month. African Americans and whites use drugs at similar rates, but the imprisonment rate of African Americans for drug charges is almost 6 times that of whites. As of October 2016, there have been 1900 exonerations of the wrongfully accused, 47% of the exonerated were African American. Lastly, African American defendants are 22% more likely to have convictions involving police misconduct that eventually result in exoneration.

In two different places, the text for today leaves us with the Greek word *Aphesis*; release. The Spirit exists and is present in Jesus' ministry, not because he claims it to be. It is present and active because it has anointed Jesus to spread the word of release to the captives, to liberate all who find oppression and whose lives are caught up in the world which far too often rewards greediness in place of compassion. *Aphesis* – release. Release the captive and release each of us from the sin of complacency, from the sin of silence, from the lie that there are some human beings who are more worthy, more loved, more blessed than others. Release, from judgement, from judgement that somehow justifies the imprisonment of some, while in truth, all of us have committed sins and acts of wrongdoing. Release, from the myth that some of us have more repentance to do than others, from the myth that what we have is entirely our own and that it is ours to keep from our siblings. Release, from the arbitrary standard on which we claim to base our society that continues to keep Black individuals from seeing their full potential, while excusing white ignorance and inaction with labels like “acceptable” and “proper.”

The Gospel message for this morning is one that is designed for all of us to hear. It is a message of freedom for all human beings, not just physical freedom, but spiritual freedom, freedom that allows the Spirit to take spark in each of us so that all of us may make our mark on the world, so that all of us will use our gifts and passions for the bettering of God's holy community, in which every last one of us is welcomed and celebrated.

For those who possess privilege, the radical Gospel message that the Spirit comes to anoint the liberation of all may find us uncomfortable with the truths it reveals – that there are others among God’s beloved who do not possess this same liberation which God has promised for all. Jesus came to this world, he took on flesh, he went to his own home town, to let us know that God is with the oppressed. To let us know that God was with those who were enslaved then and those who are enslaved now. God is with the one in prison yearning for freedom, God is with those on the outside making waves of change so that none will be imprisoned no more.

We turn to God, the one whose Spirit is dancing and calling, the one whose voice is compelling us to stand not idle as we echo in our own lives and actions that Black Lives Matter. Black Lives Matter, to God, to Jesus, to the Spirit of companionship which leaves us not alone to do the task of justice to which we are called as Christians.

We commemorate Juneteenth, giving God thanks for the freedom which the Spirit provides, and the hands and feet we now are to use in response. In the name of the Spirit, in the name of the Jesus who saves and liberates, whose setting free is healing itself, may we hear the voice of the Spirit in this place. May we pick up our crosses and consecrate the road ahead with the love of the liberating Lord. May all be free. Amen.

Feasting on the Word with Music

With the Trio:

I'll Go Where You Want Me to Go

Communion

With Pastor Doug Collins

Music by Ben Smith, piano solo:

Eat This Bread

Invitation

As we prepare to receive this meal, which we have come to know and expect and enjoy each week, my prayer is that this morning we don't lose sight of the radical nature of the very message and love, which it symbolizes. Jesus welcomed and welcomes all to this table. Servants or free, Jew or Gentile, black or white, male or female, no matter how one might identify or find themselves living about in this world, God has a mind and a heart for them.

Words of Institution

God has a mind and a heart for you and welcomes each of us to this table of redemption. So that we may remember that night when Jesus gathered with his disciples in that upper room, they had come to expect to receive this bread and this cup, when Jesus did a new

thing. And taking that loaf of bread, he blessed it and he gave thanks for it. And then he broke it. He said, take of this all of you, this is my body given for you. After supper, Jesus took the cup and gave thanks for it and blessed it. He poured it and he said, drink of this all of you. This is my blood poured out for the forgiveness of the sins of many. As often as you gather eat of this bread, drink of this cup in remembrance of me all are welcome to this table and God's love accepts and welcomes all here and now.

Prayer

Let us pray. Holy God, we give you thanks for the bread and for this cup. May it nourish our bodies so that we may focus again on that which you are calling us to do: to recognize the ways in which we possess privilege in our society and to utilize that privilege and that power for the freedom and liberation of all of our siblings. You come to us in the form of a lowly servant. You come and join those who are imprisoned, and those who are seeking redemption and healing and peace in many forms. So, bless this bread and cup as it blesses us and may we make our lives a pattern of that love for all to continue to be welcome. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen

These are the gifts of God, and we are the people of God. Let us receive this holy feast. Amen.

Benediction

Pastor Doug Collins

As we depart, hear these words of benediction: Dear friends, the glory of God is at your fingertips. The hope of freedom is one that each of us have the power to create for one another in doing that which you call us to do: to feed the hungry, to release the captives, and to be God's love wherever you shall go next. So, God bless you. God keep you this day and forever. And let us continue to work for God's justice until all know God's liberating love. Halleluia. Amen.

Postlude

FCC Trio

We Are Walking

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